

8/04/2009 This Week in Congress

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August 4, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." During the month of August, Congress will be in recess. This will give me the opportunity to travel around the state to visit communities, conduct town hall tour stops and participate in events. I am eager to have the next several weeks to get back to the state to visit with as many residents as I can about the issues they are interested in talking with me about. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Attending Leavenworth Press Conference

Yesterday, I joined Senator Sam Brownback, Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins and Leavenworth Mayor Shay Baker at a press conference to address recent media reports stating the Obama Administration is considering Kansas or Michigan for the new site to house Guantanamo Bay terrorist detainees. During the press conference, I had the opportunity to reiterate my strong opposition for the transfer of terrorist detainees from Guantanamo Bay detention facility to the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth.

The Obama Administration's consideration of Leavenworth as a destination for detainees is simply irresponsible and

continues the pattern of the Administration's poor and rushed planning on this issue. The Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth is a medium-security facility for military prisoners, unfit for terrorist detainees.

A crucial reason why detainees should not be transferred to Kansas is that Fort Leavenworth houses the Army's Command and General Staff College. The facility is known as the 'Intellectual Center of the Army.' Transferring terrorists to the fort would disrupt Fort Leavenworth's primary mission of military education and discourage international military officers from attending the college. Also, transferring terrorists to the fort would threaten the safety of the residents living on the post and in the nearby communities.

I continue to stand firm in my position that terrorist detainees do not belong in Kansas. [Click here to watch my interview on FOX News following the press conference.](#)

No Rushed Vote on Health Care Reform

As I travel around the state in August, my guess is that I will hear a lot about health care from Kansans. Given the complexity of health care reform and the impact it will have on families, patients, business owners, and providers, I am relieved that House Democratic leadership did not rush a vote on a bill prior to recess. Over the next month, I will share with Kansans my ideas for health care reform. [Click here to view several of these ideas.](#)

As the health care debate has unfolded, I have written a number of editorials expressing my concerns regarding health care reform. Below are my most recent editorials:

- [A Prescription for Health Care Reform- Click here to read more.](#)
- [Protect Seniors in Health Care Reform- Click here to read more.](#)
- [Consider Rural Needs in Health Care Debate- Click here to read more.](#)
- [With Health Care, One Size DoesNot Fit All- Click here to read more.](#)

Kansas Delegation Defends NBAF

I, along with the members of the Kansas congressional delegation, responded to a news article and government report this week about the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), which is scheduled to be constructed in Manhattan, Kansas. The publications called into question the selection and safety of the laboratory.

A thorough and fair process by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) concluded that Manhattan is the best location for NBAF. Building a new, state of the art facility in Kansas is significantly safer than using the current deteriorating and limited facility on Plum Island. Kansas is recognized to have the infrastructure, the knowledge and the commitment to ensure that NBAF's mission is fulfilled.

Protecting the safety of humans and animals is a national security priority. To keep America's food supply safe and our agricultural economy strong, this critical animal disease research must move forward. [Click here to read the joint statement from the Kansas congressional delegation in regard to the inaccurate news article.](#) [Click here to read the joint statement from the Kansas congressional delegation in regard to the flawed government report.](#)

Access to Health Care In and Around Pottawatomie County

On Friday, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a final regulation for hospital payment rates that will allow continued Medicare participation for Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) located in counties that had been re-designated from rural to urban. This designation helps many hospitals to operate in rural Kansas communities, including Community Healthcare System, Inc. in Onaga and Wamego City Hospital in Wamego. Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins and I have been working together on this issue as it affects patients in both of our districts.

Several weeks ago, I met with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius in Washington, D.C., to discuss this issue and present options where CMS could preserve CAH designation for these hospitals. I was glad to hear this week that critical access designation for Community Healthcare System, Inc. in Onaga, which also has a clinic in Frankfort, and Wamego City Hospital in Wamego will be preserved. Access to health care is essential for rural communities to survive. I am very pleased that CMS has exercised its discretion to allow these hospitals to maintain their CAH status.

[Click here to read more about this issue.](#)

Flawed Food Safety Legislation Passes the House

This week, the House of Representatives approved legislation that attempts to improve our nation's food safety system. While I am a proponent of finding ways to improve our food safety system, this legislation fell short of that goal. The legislation will cause significant adverse consequences to farmers, especially our smallest ones. Those

consequences include on-farm performance standards, record-keeping requirements, arbitrary record access requirements, and registration fees - none of which may actually improve food safety.

The bill will also impose new fees and regulatory burdens on grain elevators. Instead of finding commonsense ways to strengthen what is already the safest food supply in the world, this bill overlays another system of unnecessary bureaucracy that will cost farmers, ranchers, small businesses, and ultimately consumers more money. I will continue to work to find ways to improve this legislation so that it becomes something that will improve food safety without imposing unnecessary burdens on Kansas businesses.

Speaking about the Importance of the Aviation Industry

I spoke to the House of Representatives this week about the importance of the aviation industry. Millions of Americans are employed by this industry that contributes so much to the strength of our economy. In Kansas, aviation is especially important. About 20 percent of the state's manufacturing employment is based in the industry and tens of thousands of Kansans work to produce the best aircraft in the world.

Yet the industry faces significant challenges. The recession has hit aviation hard, and many workers have lost their jobs. During these difficult times, Congress especially needs to be supportive of this critical component of America's manufacturing base. I urged passage of legislation this week, H. Res. 508, which recognizes the general aviation industry for its many and valuable contributions to our country. I also urged my colleagues to join me in pledging to do all we can to promote aviation through responsible policy.

Eliminating Earmarks in Department of Defense Appropriations

On Thursday, The House passed legislation to fund the Department of Defense for the upcoming year. During consideration of this bill, I voted to eliminate over 540 earmarks worth approximately \$1.3 billion contained within this measure. All of these earmarks have been awarded to private companies. While I have no doubt that some of these earmarks may have a legitimate purpose, I believe the earmark process needs to be reformed, especially earmarks designated for private businesses.

Of the 540 earmarks, over 70 of these projects were awarded to former clients of the PMA group, a lobbying firm that is under investigation by the Justice Department and House Ethics Committee.

Maintaining America's "Orphan" Highways

This week, I sponsored legislation that will provide funding to restore and maintain America's "orphan" highways by providing redevelopment and business opportunities for local communities. Due to the development of Interstates, rural communities that flourished from the initial growth of small American highways are now being by-passed and their main streets are being abandoned. The Orphan Highway Restoration Act will provide assistance to towns across the nation that want to repair their main streets that otherwise would not have the resources to do so. This legislation would direct money to maintain and rehabilitate America's main streets by funding improvements to sidewalks, medians and traffic signals.

Morris County Added to Disaster Declaration

This week, I announced that Morris County has been added to the list of eligible counties to receive Public Assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). As a result of severe winter storms and record, or near-record, snow during the period of March 26-29, 2009, a major disaster declaration for the State of Kansas was issued to help communities recover from the severe storm.

Federal Coordinating Officer Mike Karl said the assistance for Morris County was approved based on a review of damage data gathered by federal, state and local disaster officials. I am glad that the request was approved and extended to Morris County so that citizens can continue to recover. [Click here](#) to see the list of counties eligible to receive assistance.

More Must be Done in Darfur

Five years ago, Congress declared the atrocities taking place in Darfur, Sudan, genocide. While it is important to call things what they are, it is even more important to take action to stop the loss of life. I addressed the House of Representatives on the fifth anniversary of the genocide declaration this week and expressed my disappointment that peace does not yet prevail in Sudan.

In 2007, I traveled to Darfur and saw genocide and its consequences firsthand. As witnesses to genocide, we and all nations are obligated to take every necessary step to end the loss of life. I called on nations with significant influence in Sudan, including China, to fully commit to helping end the killing and violence in Darfur. The world has said "never again." The world must mean it. [Click here](#) to watch my remarks.

Tele-Town Hall Meeting

For the second week in a row, I conducted a Tele-Town Hall meeting from my office in Washington, D.C., to discuss current issues with Kansans. Hosting a Tele-Town Hall allows me to conduct a telephone conference call with up to 25,000 Kansans. Those who choose to participate have the option to ask questions during the call. The conference call provides me the opportunity to listen and to speak directly with Kansans who have issues or concerns on their minds.

During this call, Kansans primarily focused discussion on health care reform. I was glad to talk to a number of callers about issues that are important to them. Thank you to those who were able to participate in the Tele-Town Hall.

Voting No to 'Cash for Clunkers'

On Friday, I voted against a \$2 billion extension of the 'cash for clunkers' program, which ultimately passed the House. I am concerned how easily Congress and the President can spend huge amounts of money. Kansas auto dealers have also raised concerns of how the program has been administered.

From Washington to Home: Annual Listening Tour Continues

During the month of August, I will be traveling around Kansas conducting town hall tour stops. These meetings help me stay in touch with Kansans and learn about what issues continue to be important to them.

Below is a list of my upcoming town hall tour stops in the month of August:

Thursday, August 13

McPherson County Tour Stop, Lindsborg

Time: 12:30 to 1:30 PM

Location: City Hall

Room: Council Room

Address: 121 S. Main

Marion County Tour Stop, Hillsboro

Time: 2:30 to 3:30 PM

Location: Wolhgemuth Music Education Center lobby, Tabor College

Address: 400 South Jefferson Street

Chase County Tour Stop, Cottonwood Falls

Time: 4:30 to 5:30 PM

Location: The Emporium

Address: 220 1/2 Broadway

Tuesday, August 18

Morton County Tour Stop, Elkhart

Time: 7:30 to 8:30 AM

Location: Morton County Civic Center

Address: 400 E. Orchard

Stevens County Tour Stop, Hugoton

Time: 9:15 to 10:15 AM

Location: Common Grounds

Address: 531 S. Main Street

Seward County Tour Stop, Liberal

Time: 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Location: Chamber of Commerce

Address: 4 Rock Island Road

Residents are invited to attend the town halls to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule and the areas I have stopped this year.](#)

Tipton Community Visit

On Saturday, I had the pleasure of meeting with Tipton residents at a benefit held to support St. Boniface Parish School. For over 60 years, this small community of 250 people has come together to keep vital services in its town, as well as creating new opportunities for area residents. The community has been working together to raise money for the school, which relies on this yearly picnic as its main source of funding. This was a great opportunity to visit with local residents and to learn about the many good things going on in the community. Thanks to all residents for welcoming me during my visit.

Meeting with Fort Leavenworth Area Defense Businesses

On Monday, I met with leaders from businesses in Leavenworth that contract with our military to do work at Ft. Leavenworth. I learned much about these defense contractors and the several thousand local employees they represent, including issues with maintaining a talented workforce, innovation in the private sector and opportunities for contracting with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We also discussed health care reform legislation. This conversation will be useful as Congress addresses these issues and I work to strengthen military installations and their communities in Kansas. [Click here to read more about my efforts to support our military.](#)

In the Office

Rachel Willis of Topeka was in with Kids Voting USA to discuss efforts to prepare young people to be educated and engaged voters. The national headquarters for Kids Voting USA is now located in Topeka. Jerry Simer of Overland Park

was in with Best Buy to talk about legislative proposals affecting the retail electronics industry.

Jane Rhys of Topeka, Dawn Wilson of Erie and Scott Shepherd of Overland Park were in with the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities to support the interest and rights of Kansans with developmental disabilities and their families. Bobby Patton of Lawrence was in with the Heart of America Public Service Academy to share his support for a national public college devoted to developing civilian public sector leaders.

Gerald Schmitt of Wichita, Mary Tritsch of Topeka and Jan Jordan of Lawrence were in with AARP Kansas to visit about lowering health care costs, improving delivery of care and providing affordable health insurance. Sue Greenleaf of Greensburg and Jim Flax of Wichita were in with the American Counseling Association to discuss the role of licensed professional counselors and licensed family counselors in health care. Sue Peterson, Ron Trewyn, Brian Wenrich and Aaron Kadavy of Manhattan; and Jennifer Crow of Topeka stopped by to visit.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Representative Don Hill and Robbie Hill of Emporia; Trent, Christine, Joseph and Sean Brunner of Peabody; Alan and Sylvia Schmidt of Mt. Hope, Daniel, Kathy, Nicholas, Stephen and Kelly Nugent of Leawood; and Brett and Laine Randolph of Andover. In from Hays were Dick, Kay, Austin and Preston Werth; Kirk, Deb, Tyler, and Tanner Chapin; and David, Sheila, Sierra and Derek Eichmann.

Also in for a tour were Ron and Cris Darmon of Wichita; Craig, Beth, Ashley, and Mason Rohleder of Gorham; Brad Vieux of Overland Park; Brian, Annette and Caleb Lang of Solomon; Greg and Karen Bond of Sylvan Grove; and Gary, Kasey, Alexander, Jackson and Glynn Wolf of McPherson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry